

## **Faiya Fredman: Flowers and Feeling**

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Faiya Fredman is an artist who has been using photography for several decades to create memorable images. Yet she is not, strictly speaking, a photographer. In previous bodies of work, the medium has served her efforts to document the decomposition of sea life on the beach near her former home in Del Mar, or as an index to important archaeological excavations that she observed alongside the Mediterranean. In the latest body of work, Fredman has carefully arranged flower petals, leaves, stems, seed-pods and occasionally fragments of text on a flatbed scanning device. The result has been luminous compositions of breathtaking beauty. These highly evocative representations forcefully draw on some well known photographic precedents. This is just to say that it is easy to make comparisons between Fredman's most recent series and the botanical cyanotypes of Anna Atkins (1799-1871), or the sterling plant studies of Karl Blossfeldt (1865-1932). Perhaps the artist that comes most poignantly to mind, however, is Man Ray (1890-1976), whose black and white "photograms" share undeniable kinship with these abstract, mysterious forays into direct composition. While each of these art historical connections can be made, insisting upon them too much risks obscuring the sheer originality of the works by Faiya Fredman shown here.

I have been a fortunate visitor to Faiya's studio many times during the past three years. Shortly after her beloved husband's death, she initiated one aspect of the highly personal investigation that finds its first public exhibition here. The works did not so much commemorate Micky, as they traced Faiya's efforts to reconcile her grief with her fundamental creative impulse. It was hard not to admire the raw feeling that these first works embodied. My recollection is that the artist would spread flowers across her digital scanner in a more or less random manner. In so doing, she would record in an immediate and profound way her mostly intuitive responses to the living organism. By leaving the same plant materials on the glass deck over a period of days, an inevitable wilting and discoloration of those natural forms took place. Pollen separated from the plant anatomy and once iridescent color lost its brilliant sheen: powder fell loose on the platen, purple and pink both turned similar shades of brown.

These experiments started as a fairly plain metaphor about decay and loss, but over time the pictorial effort has evolved into something far more nuanced and poetic. While she has remained committed to several basic themes, and a certain economy of materials runs throughout her work, Faiya has become an expert at composing and varying the compositions she creates. The range of effects achieved through trial and error, as well as computer-aided changes—is startling. For me, these trips to the studio were always full of surprise, new revelations, and further refinements of technique. "Don't stop," I must have said in the midst of each of these visits. "You are on a roll." "I have no intention of stopping," she would reply with a smile. Her dialogue with the flowers and herself—the

effects she achieved with her digital manipulations—were plainly satisfying to her. They are, as well, to the viewer.

The range of work that Faiya has produced throughout this series is undeniably impressive. Against a velvety black or, more occasionally now, against a solid white background she confidently distributes a narrow range of chosen materials. Sometimes the resulting image is lush and energetic; its fundamental quality of movement includes an almost painterly sense of brushwork and physical expansion. In other examples, an economy of forms yields spare but carefully balanced landscapes—visual haiku—that stand at the opposite end of the aesthetic spectrum from the more baroque sensibilities just mentioned. In every case, however, the feeling that underlies these compositions appears both brave and authentic. Faiya Fredman is an artist who is enjoying an uncommonly productive phase of work and has hit an enviably successful stride within that phase. We all should take pride in her achievements. Certainly, her presence in the art community of San Diego is something to celebrate, as is the current exhibition itself. To Faiya, I want to say once more what she has already heard me emphasize on numerous occasions: Don't stop. You are on a roll.